A Swedish Treasure-Trove--SVAR

Elisabeth Thorsell
Some things you might find on the
SVAR web site (www.svar.ra.se)

By Elisabeth Thorsell

For the last few years there has been
a full page ad in each SAG from the
SVAR institution, but who are they
and why are they of interest to
genealogists?

It is a long story, and has to do
with the Swedish labor market and
the efforts to keep the countryside
alive. Already in the early 1980s the
Provincial Archives (Landsarkivet) in
Härnösand started a registry base in
Ramsele, way up in the forests of
Ångermanland, where there were
many unemployed individuals, main-
ly women who had difficulties in find-
ing proper jobs there. The men could
at that time still find plenty of work
in the forests. So the women went
through various kinds of documents
and indexed them for the Landsarki-
vet; this was even before the age of
personal computers. Later the work-
place was transferred to Riksarkivet
(National Archives) and put in
charge of microfilming the Swedish
church records after 1860 and pro-
ducing microfiche of all of them. They
also have produced microfiche of military records, court records, old manuscripts, and much more. They have a very nice research room in Ramsele which is free to use by all visitors.

With the advent of the internet, SVAR also went online and has now grown a very interesting web site, full of useful things for all researchers, not just genealogists.

The SVAR web site is mainly in Swedish, but has a large English language section also. Most of the contents are only accessible if you have a subscription.

**Church records**

On the start page you will find the link to the English site in the upper right-hand corner, and that is also where you can log in.

After logging in, you will notice a window in the middle of the screen which says “Shortcuts – Scanned documents”; click on it and choose church records. Now you first get a list of the counties and you have to click on the county name, and then on the parish which interests you.

If you see a blue arrow, there are scanned records available.

*Note:* Scanned documents are saved in the DjVu format, which means you need a plugin to view the images. You will find a link to the plugin on the start page, and the parish page. You will not find church records that are younger than 100 years, as those are only available at the archives.

At the time of writing, scanned records for the whole period from the 1600s up to 1895 are available for the counties of Örebro and Uppsala. This is a result of the cooperation between the Genealogical Society of Utah and the Riksarkivet, where the goal is to scan the first generation films made in the 1950s to get clearer and sharper pictures than what is currently available on microfiche. This scanning is very fast and will probably be completed within a year or two.

Another set of films are scanned records for the time 1895-1905 which are a result of SVAR scanning all the younger records, up to 1991, when the church records stopped.

The parishes in the districts of the Landsarkiv in Härnösand and Uppsala were filmed before they changed to scanning directly. Those northern records are on microfiche and can be bought from SVAR. The change of technology happened when half of the church records for the district of Västena (Östergötland, Småland, and Öland) had been filmed, the other half was scanned.

A red arrow shows what is on microfiche, and for some parishes you can buy those up to the middle 1920s, or even later.

**The Tax census (Mantalslängder)**

From the early 1620s every adult person, with some exceptions, had to pay a yearly tax, called mantalspeng. To make sure that nobody evaded the tax, the officials kept yearly registers of all people in the country, called mantalslängder, and they have mostly survived through the centuries.

They are not as detailed as the husförhörslängder, but can be helpful in the times before those were kept.

They are kept by county and parish. People are listed by the farm they owned or leased, and people with patronymic names often were just listed with their first name. The wife and children were recorded as marks in columns, as well as farm hands and maids. Children under the age of 15 and people older than 65 were usually exempted, as well as soldiers, but not the soldier’s family.

An example of a mantalslängd is the handwriting example in this issue.

You will find the mantalslängder 1642-1820 by going to “Scanned documents” on the start page and then clicking on “Tax Census.” Then chose the county you like and the year, and click on the volume. When the pages appear you will find a very helpful list of parishes on the right-hand side, which you can click on and it will take you to the parish you want. Remember that the boundaries of Sweden changed in the 1600s, so for Halland, for instance, you will not find these records before 1669. See an example of mantalslängder on page 14.

**The shortcut to databases**

This useful window is found on the starting page and has links to many interesting databases. A short description of these follows here.

**Birth, marriage, and death databases**

Some modern databases of Births, Marriages, and Deaths (födelse, vigsel, and död) are to be found here.

These databases do not cover the whole country, but only some parishes in Angermanland, Medelpad, Småland, and a few ones in Östergötland and Västergötland are included. On the search page of the database there is a link to information on how to do the search and about the contents. If you are lucky it can be a convenient shortcut to looking up the original records.

**Census database**

The Census database (Sveriges befolkning) consists of a modern database, compiled from excerpts of clerical surveys that the pastors had to send in to the Central Bureau of Statistics (Statistiska Centralbyrån / SCB) every 10 years. Here you find complete databases for 1890 and 1900, and several counties completed for 1880, and more to come. Databases for 1860 and 1870 have been started, but will take a long time to complete. It should be noted that both 1890 and 1900 are also available on CD:

**Convicts**

This database contains records, with many photos, on 8,000 convicts from 1877 to 1925, searchable in many ways. If you find a relative here you will have all the information necessary to find him in the court records.
The man in the example is the former carpenter Lars Johan Söderman, who was released on the 4th of April 1882 from the penitentiary at Karlskrona. His roll number was 80 and his number in the portrait roll was 152.

He was born 23 October 1827 in Hedemora, which also is the place where he was last recorded. He has now undergone punishment for 5th time for stealing and fraud. He was sentenced by the Västerås Magistrat rate on 30 November 1875. He was sentenced to 6 years and 7 months of hard labor and 10 years loss of his civil rights. He started his time in jail on the 4th of December 1875. He had previously been punished for 4th time for stealing. When he was released he was to stay in Karlskrona. During his time in jail he had saved 85 kronor and 60 öre. His hair was dark brown, his beard speckled grey, his nose crooked, his mouth ordinary, his skin a bit dark, he was 5 feet 5.2 inches tall, his body was of ordinary build, and as an unusual mark his fourth finger on the left hand was unusable. And then his picture adds a lot to the information. It is not many of you ancestors, born in the 1820s, that you know this much about.

In the 1890 Swedish census he is listed under Hedemora, but with a note that nobody knew where he was. In 1900 he is no longer listed anywhere.

Image database
This section has a few images of birth, marriage, and death (födelse, vigsel, and död) records for Jämtland, as well as extracts from the clerical surveys 1860 for Västerbotten and 1870 for Norrbotten and Västerbotten, and the whole country for 1880, 14 counties for 1890, and again the whole country for 1900.

An interesting database under this heading is the one from Krigsarkivet (War Archive) which has photos of officers both from the army and the navy.

An example of the information on a convict.

From left: John Gustaf Nauckhoff (born 1867), Alfred Meyerson (born 1866).
Inventory database
This database has indexes to probates in the counties of Norrbotten, Södermanland, Uppsala, and Västmanland. The indexes are searchable in many ways. Once you find that a person has a probate, you get the full citation to obtain a copy, either on microfiche or from the archive.

Seamen’s houses (also Seamen’s registries) Sjömanshus
This database has information on thousands of merchant seamen from Sweden and one in Finland. The seamen’s houses in the database are the following: Härnösand, Gamlakarleby (Finland), Västervik, Hudiksvall, Söderhamn, Gävle, Karlskrona, Oskarshamn, Visby, and Örnsköldsvik. The information is uneven, but you usually get place and date of birth, maybe the father’s name, the ship the man sailed on, etc. If he ran away or left his ship in some other irregular way that is also recorded in these rolls.

Village and farm database
This database contains information on place names within a parish, and it also gives the page and the microfiche number for the place you are looking for. Unfortunately it does not cover the whole country, but it does cover the counties of Blekinge, Gävleborg, Halland, Jämtland, Kronoberg, and Västerbotten.

There are many other interesting things to find on the SVAR web site, but mainly in Swedish. However, SVAR has a good online bookstore with a number of books on Swedish history and culture in English which you can easily browse.

www.svar.ra.se

Subscriptions
At the moment the following subscriptions are available for private persons:

Prices in SEK
- Annual subscription 1195:-
- Half year subscription 695:-
- Monthly subscription 245:-
- 10 visits (3 hours each)* 295:-
- 1 visit (3 hours)** 50:-

* Valid 1 year.
** Only credit card (not invoice).
Valid three consecutive hours and will be activated when payment is fulfilled.
All subscriptions gives access to all databases and scanned images on our website.

The Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellowship

This annual fellowship is designed to help defray costs for one person doing research for an extended period of time at the Center and was established by Nils William Olsson, a leading authority in the field of Swedish-American studies (and founding editor of SAG), and his wife Dagmar.

The fellowship, which is in the amount of $1,500 (taxable income), is open to anyone doing academic research on any aspect of Swedish-American history. It is not intended to be used for research on a person’s individual family history. We particularly encourage graduate students and younger scholars to apply. The minimum stay required at the Swenson Center is three weeks, and the fellowship must be used within one year of notification.

Anyone interested in applying for the fellowship should submit a two-to-three-page proposal to the Swenson Center outlining the proposed research topic. The proposal should also include a current curriculum vitae, as well as a statement showing how the resources of the Swenson Center are appropriate for the particular project.

The deadline for applications is May 1, 2007.

Mailing address:
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